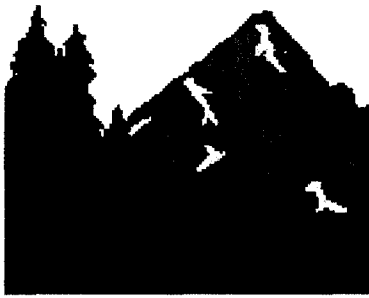


P.O. Box 800
Craig, AK 99921
Phone 907-826-3274
FAX 907-826-3322



CRAIG CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Ronald W. Erickson, Superintendent

Camille Booth, Principal
Doug Rhodes, Principal
Bill Whicker, Principal

November 19, 2003

Mr. Darroll Hargraves, Chair
Local Boundary Commission
550 West Seventh Avenue, Suite 1770
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-3510

RECEIVED

NOV 20 2003

Local Boundary Commission

Dear Mr. Hargraves,

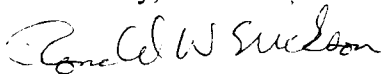
Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the questions relating to school consolidation. Your first question regarding the best interests of the children and public compelling school consolidation is a difficult question to answer. I am sure you are aware that with rare exception there are no large scale savings with school consolidation. Studies have shown that over a period of 5-10 years after consolidation, costs to operate consolidated schools nearly equal what the costs would be to operate the schools had they not been consolidated. This was borne out in studies in New York State, Kansas, and Iowa which, back in the 1950's through the 1970's, underwent significant consolidation efforts. So the question of the public interest as it pertains to cost savings is probably not compelling. On the other hand, if the public interest is better served through enhanced educational opportunities and a greater portion of the dollars available being spent on instruction, it would appear that there could be a compelling argument made in some cases. For instance, very small high schools are not able to provide the breadth and depth of programming that a larger school could provide. Some classes can be provided in the small schools with the use of technology but the performing arts, and many vocational classes do not lend themselves to a distance education format. One might say that shifting substantial funding from central administration to classroom instruction through school district consolidation could provide more opportunities for students either in coursework or remediation of basic skills. This could constitute a compelling argument for both the public and the students. One of the biggest arguments against consolidation is of course the loss of local control as viewed by the communities involved. That is probably one of the most compelling reasons to NOT consolidate as the smaller communities will lose control of what happens to their schools. Unfortunately, this need for local control is many times in conflict with what is in the best interest of the students educationally although not necessarily culturally. The gap between educational opportunity and local control, particularly as it relates to cultures, is significant in Alaska.

Aspects that I believe need to be considered before any consolidation plan is promoted or recommend include: reasonable geographic proximity of the schools; language/cultural similarities; school board representation (organization); funding changes/enhancements (incentives); potential cost savings (economies of scale, particularly in central administration); and of course a reasonable expectation that student learning will be improved. I believe there are several instances where by using these criteria, school consolidation could or in some cases should take place.

The second question related to options for school consolidation are well addressed by Senator Wilken. I think that the use of the third class borough is one option that is much more palatable by some regions than is the first, second or home rule borough. I do not think you should try to recommend actual individual school consolidation within established districts or between neighboring districts such as forcing the closure of one high school and sending all the students to the neighboring school district. I think the considerations need to be consolidation of school districts and then let the new district school board make the determination about individual school consolidations. One of the greatest fears is that communities will lose their schools if consolidated. That must be a local school board decision, not one made by either the Boundary Commission or the Legislature. School size is already an issue in that schools of less than 10 are not funded. They close because of the funding and that decision is made by the local school board.

In closing, I only hope that either the Boundary Commission or the Legislature does something definitive this year and gets us past the continual upheaval that these discussions generate. These issues are so divisive and take so much of a community and school's efforts to respond to, which drains time and resources from instruction which is already scarce. I keep hearing that "boroughization and/or school consolidation" is eventually going to happen, so let's get on with it if that is so.

Sincerely,



Ronald W. Erickson
Superintendent of Schools
Craig City School District

CC: Roger Sampson, Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development
801 West Tenth Street, Suite 200
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1894